

MEMORANDUM

TO: Laureen Borochaner, Chief, Engineering Division (USACE)
FROM: John Mitnik, Chief District Engineer (SFWMD)
Akin Owosina, Chief, Hydrology & Hydraulics Bureau (SFWMD)
DATE: February 17, 2022
SUBJECT: Operational Position Statement for February 15, 2022 to February 21, 2022

This Position Statement is to provide operational recommendations for the one-week period from February 15, 2022 to February 21, 2022 based on system conditions and data observed during the previous Monday to Sunday 7-day period. On February 14, Lake Okeechobee stage was 14.88 feet NGVD, which places it within the Low Sub-band of the 2008 Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule (LORS). Lake stage decreased by 0.01 feet during the preceding 7 days.

District rainfall February to date is below normal (~85% of normal). Rainfall forecast (issued February 15) predicts near-normal rainfall for south and east of the District and below normal elsewhere for the coming 7-day period. The following 7-day period is forecasted to have below normal rainfall, with well below average expected in the interior and west.

Precipitation Outlook: The most recent CPC precipitation outlooks for South Florida for February 2022 is for increased chances of below-normal rainfall. The outlook for the 3-month windows of Feb – Apr is for substantially increased chances of below-normal rainfall. The outlook for the 3-month windows of Mar – May indicates slightly increased chances of below normal rainfall. The outlook for the 3-month windows Apr – Jun and May – Jul is for equal chances of below-normal, normal and above-normal rainfall. The outlook turns to increased chances of above-normal rainfall for the northern portion of the District and to slightly increased chances of above-normal rainfall for the central portion of the District for the 3-month window of Jun – Aug, while the southern third of the District has equal chances of below, normal and above-normal rainfall.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part C): With Lake Okeechobee stage within the Low Sub-band and the Tributary Hydrologic Conditions in the dry category, Part C of the 2008 LORS suggests “No releases to the WCAs”.

Over the 7-day period from February 07, 2022 to February 13, 2022, deliveries from Lake Okeechobee were 200 acre-feet to STA-2. No Lake regulatory releases reached the Lake Worth Lagoon through the C-51 canal. Stage in WCA-1 is above regulation schedule in Zone A1, stage in WCA-2A is above schedule, and WCA-3A stage is below schedule (Zone B). For the coming operational period, the USACE is not requesting regulatory releases be sent south from Lake Okeechobee towards the WCAs.

2008 LORS Release Guidance (Part D): With Lake Okeechobee stage in the Low Sub-band and the Tributary Hydrologic Conditions in the dry category, Part D of the 2008 LORS suggests “S-79 Up to 450 cfs and S-80 Up to 200 cfs”.

For the 7-day period February 07, 2022 to February 13, 2022, total discharge to the St. Lucie Estuary was near 250 cfs with no flows coming from Lake Okeechobee. The 7-day average salinity at the US1 Bridge is in the good range for adult oysters. Total inflow to the Caloosahatchee Estuary averaged approximately 2,000 cfs over the past week with about 1,250 cfs coming from Lake Okeechobee. Salinity conditions are in the good range for Tape Grass at Val I-75 and at Ft. Myers. Salinity conditions for adult eastern oysters are in the good range at Shell Point, Sanibel and Cape Coral.

The District will continue to work with the USACE to manage Lake Okeechobee levels in an effort to curtail harmful discharges over this year. Generally speaking, the District and Corps should strive to move as much water out of the lake without harming natural resources and other critical resources. At this time, this involves releases that maintain appropriate salinity in the estuaries and ensuring the Stormwater Treatment Areas don’t sustain long term damage from extended high-volume flows. Current District operational objectives are to continue to move water south from Lake Okeechobee for delivery to the Everglades where opportunities exist.

The District recommends USACE continue lake discharges to the Caloosahatchee Estuary in a pulse release fashion, measured at S-79, at a non-damaging level of 2,000 cfs (7-day average), while continuing to monitor estuary conditions and make any adjustments as necessary. This decision should be reassessed as needed based on lake and estuarine conditions. The USACE typically implements the releases to the estuaries over a 7-day period starting on Saturday and ending on Friday.